

The Time A.C.L.U. Got the Better of C.I.A.

To the Editor:

"Dept. of Strange Bedfellows: C.I.A. and A.C.L.U." (Washington Talk, Jan. 16), about the American Civil Liberties Union's position on a bill passed last fall relating to the Central Intelligence Agency and the Freedom of Information Act says the legislation "exempts the C.I.A. from ever having to search its operational files in response to a request for data under the Freedom of Information Act" (emphasis added). That is not true. It is not even close to true.

For example, the legislation specifically provides that when individuals ask for information about themselves, the C.I.A. is required to search and review its operational files, as if the new legislation didn't exist. The same is true for requests about covert operations. The same is true for requests about allegations of improper or illegal conduct by the C.I.A., such as illegal infiltration of political organizations.

There are other important excep-

tions. All these exceptions were included in the legislation at the A.C.L.U.'s insistence to assure that the C.I.A. would not be able legally to hide, and therefore withhold, information it was otherwise obligated to disclose. If these exceptions had not been included, if the bill had exempted the C.I.A. from ever having to search and review its operational files, as you say, we would have opposed it.

The A.C.L.U. makes more Freedom of Information Act requests of the C.I.A. than anyone else. We are aware of no document previously released that would not be released because of this bill. We invited all other Freedom of Information Act users to provide examples of documents they obtained that they thought would be withheld under the new legislation. No one has provided even a single such document.

The legislation does not do what you say it does. What it will do is considerably speed up the response rate of the C.I.A. to Freedom of Information Act requests. That is important, because information delayed is information denied. The truth is we got the better of the C.I.A. this time. The new legislation will help, not hinder, the flow of information.

IRA GLASSER
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New York, Jan. 17, 1985